Steve Yeh 3/31/12

Mrs. Parris Female Protagonist Book Report

I have recently read the book, Fever 1793, by Laurie Halse Anderson. The setting started in the feverish summer of 1793 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where its urban environment plays a major part in how the yellow fever spreads throughout the city. It was also very important that the main character, Mattie Cook, was a female in the historical fiction novel.

The summer of 1793 was unbearably hot to start. Mattie Cook has to work day in and day out in her family’s coffee house. Then, the yellow fever epidemic spreads due to the close urban settings in Philadelphia. When her mother comes down with the fever, Mattie’s grandfather suggests going to the country. But, on the way there, they have to detour and they become lost. Her grandfather later dies after they return to the coffee shop, and have to fend off thieves. Mattie herself comes down with the yellow fever, and finds her mother in a makeshift hospital. At the end of the story, Mattie and her mother survive the plague and reopen the coffee house, to be living after the yellow fever outbreak.

It was very important for Mattie Cook to be the female protagonist. The story is set in a time where females aren’t respected as the same as males; they didn’t even have the right to vote yet. That makes the plot very interesting because there are many conflicts where Mattie has argue to even make a decision. She didn’t want to leave the coffee house, but her grandfather made her go away to the countryside, which turned out not to be a very good idea after they were exiled off the horse and buggy they were traveling on. Another instance is in the beginning of the story, where her mother wants her to be married off quickly. Finally, all throughout the story, Mattie has to remain rather passive, gentle and proper as a lady even though at times she becomes very impulsive such as wanting to not go the countryside and wanting to stay with her mother.

Fever 1793 was a very good work of fiction, with also incorporating substantial historical context such as females to be seen lower in social status than males. The yellow fever epidemic was an actual event in history where many people died.